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ABSTRACT

Current theories of reading are concerned with the nature of the "means" for achieving goals--processing components, paths, practices, and strategies. If reading is understood as text-oriented cultural activities, a continuum of text use can be formulated with enabling texts (those that enable the reader to do something) at one end and reflective texts (those that provide reflection on information) at the other end. These categories of texts differ in: (1) what reading them affords, (2) the relation of reading to what the texts affords, (3) the concreteness of the activity they afford, (4) the specificity of the knowledge involved in reading the texts, and (5) the criteria of "successful" or fluent reading, defined as an accurate, coherent, and useful reading. In information processing theories, enabling texts disclose what we need to learn, while reflective texts disclose what we know. Narrative and expositional texts generally fit the reflective text category, with the exception of instructional texts, which are enabling. When viewed with a concern for how social order is accomplished and reproduced, the importance of enabling texts becomes clear, since the administration of society depends on such texts. Within societies on the threshold of industrialization, reading can be appreciated as both intrapersonal and interpersonal information processing with consequences for what constitutes a relevant reading curriculum. (NKA)

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READING AS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES: ENABLING AND REFLECTIVE TEXTS

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READING AS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES: ENABLING AND REFLECTIVE TEXTS

Of course, anyone would have to admit that reading is a cultural phenomenon. And that means that it is an historical phenomenon, paralleling the development of writing and writing systems, in specific cultural settings. Reading is always reading of something which has been written. In this essay I look at well-received information processing theories of fluent reading in order to recover the place of texts in conceptions of rational, successful reading. Turning from looking at reading as cognitive processes to conceiving reading as text-oriented cultural activities, I offer a formulation of the two poles of a continuum of text use. At one end are enabling texts, which enable the reader to do some particular activity. At the other end are reflective texts, the reading of which produces reactions and reflections which may, but need not, provide grounds for engaging in concrete or abstract activities.

In relation to the text focus of information processing theories, the categories of reflective and enabling texts reveal what we know, compared to what we need to learn. When viewed with a concern for how social order is accomplished and reproduced, it turns out that enabling texts are massively important. They make interpersonal information processing possible. Thus they make bureaucracy possible, and with it, industrial and post-industrial societies. Within such societies, and perhaps especially within societies on the threshold of industrialization, it is necessary to appreciate reading as both intrapersonal and interpersonal information processing. Such an appreciation has consequences for our sense of directions and methodolgoy for research, and for our judgments as to what constitutes a relevant reading curriculum.

PART I

CULTURE

In formulating reading as cultural activities I am not working with technical or well-developed conceptions of culture (but see Cole and Scribner, 1974; Kroeber and Parsons, 1976). Culture here

4

is simply a way of making reference to the variety of activities of men and women(1) in everyday life which involve reading some formatted signs(2). These are activities which are intelligible and recognizable to competent members of a culture, including ourselves as members of the culture we study. In some cases it will make sense to call the whole activity reading, as when we see a child curled up in a corner with a book. In other cases, reading will be part of the activity, as in filing out income tax forms. Thus "reading" as a category does not mark an exhaustive, exclusive class of activities in any logical sense. I am interested in anything which members of a culture can do and recognize to be, or to involve, reading. As a sociologist, I am necessarily concerned most with the types of reading which are consequential for the accomplishment and reproduction of social order.

Where sociological and anthropological accounts of reading have addressed structures and functions of social interaction involving reading (McDermott, 1976; Bloome, 1983; Collins, 1982; Green, 1983; Heap, 1985), psychological accounts have addressed structures and functions of persons interacting with formatted signs. In that my interest in reading as cultural activities is sociological, with ethnographic affections, I take no position as to what reading really is, technically, as a set of cognitive processes. In one sense, the fact that there are theories of reading within a culture is itself part of the phenomena of interest.

In another sense, these theories have a privileged status for us. They represent our culture's best efforts to formulate what reading is. These are not formulations and descriptions of reading as constituent parts of mundane activities. The theories are psychological. They formulate reading as discrete sets of interrelated cognitive processes. Such processes can be said to occur like events in a physical universe, though their occurrence may be motivated. An alternative to conceiving reading as a set of events is to conceive reading as something persons do, as activities. This view includes the notion that reading involves cognitive processing, but seeks to understand such processing within a wider framework of activity organization.

In this essay I will retain the sociological concern with reading as cultural activities while taking as my focus psychological theories

of persons interacting with formatted signs. The result ought to be an (ideational) bridge between two lines of research on reading.

NO DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF READING

We have no theories of reading.

Were we to have a theory of reading, it would have to cover all the acts and processes which persons carry out and recognize to be reading, no matter how badly persons might read. Put differently, we have no purely descriptive theory of reading. No theory aims to describe any particular reading act which might occur in a culture. All theories, even those which seem more descriptive than others, abstract from all possible reading acts (the excellent, the unexceptional, the failures, etc.) to formulate how persons could read fluently.

Theories may list constraints, cues and strategies involved in reading (Goodman, 1985), but they do not describe, nor do they seek to describe, exactly and exhaustively how combinations of elements interact in every instance of (what can be called) reading. Such an enterprise would be one at which it would be exceedingly difficult to succeed. Not the least of one's problems would be that of deciding the boundaries between reading poorly and not reading at all.

THEORIES OF READING FLUENTLY, I

We have, and probably only can have, theories of successful, rational reading, i.e., reading fluently. All theories of reading, and especially information processing theories, are theories of reading fluently, though what counts as fluency differs from theory to theory.

What I shall call fluent reading has two dimensions:

> 1) A successful reading is a reading which meets criteria of accuracy, coherence, and possibly usefulness.
>
> 2) A rational reading is one done in a manner which is appropriate to the conditions of its accomplishment(3).

To judge that a reading is successful is to evaluate the outcome of

the reading effort, whether the "outcome" is the quality of the pronunciation of words or the quality of the comprehension of a passage. To judge that a reading is rational is to evaluate the acts, strategies, efforts, etc. which produced the outcome.

There is no necessary relation between the quality of an outcome and the quality of the acts and processes which bring about that outcome. One may read rationally, yet not succeed in producing a correct interpretation of a text. Novices to new disciplines do this repeatedly.

Perhaps more rarely, one may read in a less than rational fashion. Here we can imagine persons who labour over each word, with many regressions and sub-vocalizations, but in the end display adequate interpretation of the passage. Or, imagine the convert to speed reading who blazes through a difficult passage three times before finally meeting some criterion of comprehension.

While the relation between success and rational effort is not a necessary one, it is an empirical relation which in our culture we believe to have a high frequency correlation. Indeed, we know of no other reliable way of achieving successful reading outcomes than by rational means. This is so true that sometimes, and certainly from a first person, phenomenological perspective, we treat the rationality of our reading efforts as the measure of the success of the readings we produce. And unless our interpretation is counterindicated, by other persons or worldly experience, rational reading counts as successful reading.

THEORIES OF READING FLUENTLY, II

While I have distinguished between successful and rational reading, theorists of reading generally do not make this distinction explicitly. Implicitly it does appear in their work. When LaBerge and Samuels cite experiments and claim "The main conclusion is that what is being improved with practice is automaticity." (LaBerge and Samuels, 1985: p.699), improvement is judged in terms of successful letter recognition over a series of trials. And when Gough tells us that it is possible to "learn direct associations between the orthographic words and their meanings...but only at great (and quite unnecessary) expense" (Gough, 1985: p.665), he is arguing in terms of how reading can be done most rationally.

Successful reading and rational reading are ideas central to model building and testing. We need a strong, clear, and adequate vision of what constitutes successful reading. We use that vision in order to generate a model of how successful outcomes routinely could be produced, effectively and efficiently, given the conditions for reading. The conditions include such parameters as the medium of processing (mind or machine, assuming a difference, which is a contentious issue, see Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986(4)), the possible capabilities of such a medium (e.g., visual system, memory systems, language systems), and the materials, goals, and circumstances of processing.

Where theories of reading differ, not surprisingly, is in their formulations of how "the reading process" is organized, rationally, such that successful outcomes could be achievable, on a routine basis. The "how" of reading is the central topic of current information processing theories of reading. In terms of the grammar (see Hacker, 1972) of activity organization, current theories are concerned with the nature of the means for achieving the goals of reading. These means include processing components, paths, practices and strategies. The means are conceived as rational devices for accomplishing processing tasks conceived to be essential to, or facilitative for, successful reading. Some theorists focus on tasks of letter and word recognition (Gough, LaBerge, Samuels, Rumelhart), while others focus on higher level tasks of text comprehension (Kintsch and van Dijk, and Frederiksen, 1977).

Beaugrande's methodological efforts are instructive here, as he has compared ten theories in terms of sixteen design criteria for building information processing models of reading (Beaugrande, 1981).

Beaugrande's design criteria can be grouped in four categories, according to whether they are concerned with the rationality of reading (#1, 3, 5, 6 and 14), the nature of reading (#2, 4, 9), the properties of models (#8, 10, 12, 15, 16), or how models map reading properties (#7, 11, 13). The greatest variations between theories is to be found within the first category, "rationality of reading." This category, in my view, includes processor contribution (#1), utilization of presented material (#3), decomposition of text elements (#5), processing depth (#6) and learning and modifying of reading strategies (#14). Thus it can be said that even within the realm of

theories which share, more or less, the paradigm of information processing, what most differentiates theorists is their conception of the rationality of reading: how reading is done in a manner which is appropriate to the conditions of its accomplishment.

PART II

CONDITIONS OF RATIONALITY

What do determinations of rationality depend on, for readers? And, thus, what ought a theory of reading fluently include as conditions of rationality?

Current information processing theories address, or are concerned with, at least two conditions of rationality. They were cited above as the nature and capabilities of the medium of processing (human or machine). There are three further conditions or constraints which are relevant for determinations of rationality: materials, purposes and circumstances. The latter represent cultural conditions to which readers can orient. I call these conditions cultural because, obviously, they arise as conditions only within cultures which have reading as a recognizable type of activity. Thus it is that types of materials, purposes and circumstances are intelligible and oriented to by readers within the constraints and resources of culture.

Materials, purposes and circumstances are not biologically given or based, as might be argued in relation to the two conditions having to do with the medium of processing. And unlike the other two conditions, persons' can orient, can attend to and take into consideration, these cultural conditions in ways which make a difference to the outcomes of reading. Indeed, at some level, I would argue that they must orient, if only prereflectively, to these conditions in order to produce rational reading. What I am calling cultural conditions, then, are analytic to our concept of fluent reading(5).

While our attention ultimately will be turned to one of the conditions, the materials of reading, it will be of use to formulate all three cultural conditions of rationality, speak to their relatedness, and the types of reading they define.

Materials

Reading is always reading of something. It is analytic to the possibility of a fluent reading that one adequately identify the nature of the materials to be read. To avoid confusion, I find it useful to distinguish between two objects denoted by the term materials. One is the document, the physical object bearing signs and symbols. The other is the text, the meaning (qua sense and reference) which is realized through acts of reading the document (Heap, 1977). Document can refer to anything from an insignia sewn on a jacket, to a blackboard with a message in chalk, to a paperback book. And whatever sense is made, or reference is understood, is the meaning, the text of the document. The use of meaning here is intended as equivalent in oral discourse to what is called the locutionary level of an utterance (Austin, 1970). The text can be said to be (further) meaningful in illocutionary, symbolic, iconic, metaphorical, eliptical, personal, or social interactional ways, but none of these senses of "meaningful" is intended here.

The distinction between document and text becomes useful, and thus worth drawing, when we realize that we never first or only encounter texts. What we see first is the document. How it appears, and the degree of familiarity of the type of document we recognize it to be, can strongly affect our expectations regarding the text. Put in cognitive psychological terms: our schemata for documents are implicative for what text schema are activated. In terms of cultural patterns, certain types of documents appresent (see Husserl, 1962) certain genres of texts. Romance novels have texts appropriate to their covers. Newspaper stories, as a genre, are laid out differently than advertisements. Instructional booklets for video-cassette recorders look like documents that ought to tell you how the depicted equipment can be operated.

Purposes

It is analytic to the idea of reading that there be a purpose when one reads, otherwise one would not read at all. Two points need to be made here. First, from a phenomenological perspective on what can be called "self-reading", i.e., reading as we do it and reflect on it, not all reading acts seem equally purpose-driven. When we are riding a bus, or walking down a city street, advertisements can "catch

our eye." We read them and, upon reflection, realize that our reading acts had no clear purpose. We simply read "Drink Coke." The sign attracted attention. Were not such occurrences common, "scenic" advertisements might rarely be read. On the other hand, while such reading efforts are "automatic" (see LaBerge and Samuels, 1985), they are not without effort. In Weber's sense (Weber, 1968) they are not behaviours, where we just react to a stimulus (as to a hammer on our knee). They are actions, where we do something to achieve some end, e.g., determine what a sign says.

The second point is that purposes can be multiple and nested. I read an article on knowledge representation in a computer magazine because I want to see how knowledge is conceptualized in artificial intelligence software programs for business. But it is also my purpose to learn something about the capabilities of the program under discussion. I also want to know the price of the program and if it is into a second version yet (first versions being notorious for bugs).

Some of these multiple purposes are part of a larger set of nested purposes. As I read the article on knowledge representation I am interested in how cognitive science renders knowledge (belief which is justified socially and regarded culturally as true) into personal, cognitive structures; reading this article is serving a more general purpose. And my interest in how knowledge is treated in cognitive science is part of a larger project, whose purpose it is to ascertain the limits of cognitive science approaches to socio-culturally constituted phenomena.

Of course, higher levels could be formulated in the above hierarchy of nested purposes. Reading, as a means to achieve some purpose, is like many other instrumental acts. It can serve multiple immediate purposes, while furthering farther ones.

Circumstances

The circumstances of reading are those features of the scenic, bodily and mental environments which are or may be relevant to achieving one's purposes in attending to some document. The scenic environment is what surrounds one when engaged with a document, including the amount of light, the glare on the page, the smell of warm plastic, the radio in the background, the cat nudging for attention, or the arrangement of items on a shelf, the placement of

persons in queues, etc.

The bodily environment is an awkward phrase meant to reference bodily states which impinge on our awareness, as when we are hungry, too full, light headed, sore, suffering sinus troubles, expanding with gas, bitten by an amorous cat. The mental environment is a gloss for all the images and ideas which come to mind, nag us, lead us astray, sit on our shoulders, push us onwards, hover on the horizon, and generally distract our attention in unbidden (and not so unbidden) ways. More importantly, the mental environment includes whatever we know and believe which seems relevant to meeting our purpose in reading.

Obviously what are formulated here as separate environments are not separate in conciousness. The "environments" shade into each other. The cat nudging is bodily felt and mentally noted, perhaps as needing to be fed. These environments surround us and are defined from the null point in the body (Schutz, 1962), the center and source of our worldly existence.

What are distinguished as environments are simply the sources for objects of possible attention within reading activities. These objects of circumstance, in reflective, and pre-reflective ways, form what we retrospectively formulate as the particular context of a reading(6).

Relations of Dependence

Determinations of rationality depend on the appropriateness of reading acts to 1) the materials being read (as to type of document and genre of text), 2) the multiple, nested purposes of reading, and 3) the circumstances under which the acts are carried out. Treated as necessary to reading, the reader's sense of these three conditions must be finely tuned.

For example, if one intends to find out how the Canadian government has responded to arrests of current labour leaders in Poland, books are less sensible materials to consult than newspapers. And one must consult recent newspapers. Even a newspaper may not help if there is something about the circumstances which suggests that, though the edition of the paper is recent, the story of interest to us may not be covered, or may not be reported accurately (for we are traveling in a country which censors foreign news).

While our reading, generally, will be purpose-driven, it is carried out in terms of our beliefs and knowledge as to the type of document we have encountered, the genre of the text represented, and the open-ended, possibly changing, circumstances of our reading acts.

TYPES OF READING

Consider what we can read, and why, when, where and how we can read it, in daily life in Western cultures: Advertisements (appearing on a variety of documents: billboards, vehicles, tv screens, matchbook covers, magazines, newspapers, posters, business signs, tote bags, sport league uniforms, etc.), cartoons, sport scores, bus and train schedules, airline schedules, weather reports, greeting cards, garment labels, garment care labels, invoices, headlines, newstories, editorials, lyrics, poems, short stories and books (fiction and non-fiction, each with a number of genres), journal articles, transcripts, grant proposals, personal letters, letters of reference, letters to the editor, legal documents (a wide variety), cheques, deposit slips, withdrawal slips, financial statements and bills (utilities, credit cards) memoranda, policy statements, news releases, indexes, income tax forms, welfare forms, health care forms, insurance forms, manuals, software documentation, software menus, assembly instructions, operating instructions, recipes, health product instructions, merchandise catalogues, dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference volumes, sacred texts and religious tracts, announcements, bulletins, food labels, food menus, telephone listings, stock listings, lists of winning lottery numbers, grocery lists, laundry lists, astrological charts, sea charts, maps, theatre programs, sporting event programs, television program listings, labels-on-controls (on vehicle dashboards, VCR's, televisions, power tools, computers, assorted appliances), graffiti, etc.

These things which can be read, the document-based text materials, specify what I will call types of reading. Hence for every type of reading materal listed above, we can say that there is a type of reading appropriate to it. The relations of dependence between conditions of rational reading can be taken to define, or be implicated in, types of reading. If we read an encyclopedia article, i.e., engage in a reading-of-an-encyclopedia-article type of reading,

it is not for the same type of purposes for which we read lottery listings. While many purposes might be served by reading an encyclopedia article, not every and all variety of purpose can be served. And what is relevant (the circumstances) for achieving our purposes will also differ. So it is with other types of reading, with conditions of rationality sometimes similar, shared, or quite different.

The types of reading formulated here, at many different levels of abstraction, reflect the correlation between what is read and standard purposes for reading it, given assumedly appropriate circumstances. Thus, for every type of thing we read, there are standard sets of purposes, and imaginable circumstances where such a type of thing might be read. And for every type of thing we read, there are conventions, rules of thumb, practices, assumptions and strategies which are required or are of use for fluent reading.

THEORIES AND THE CONDITIONS OF RATIONALTIY

Theorists of reading are aware of the conditions of rationality, to varying degrees. Goodman in his IRA presidential address, and in a more recent publication (Goodman, 1985), has identified five categories of purpose for reading, which he has used to identify five types of reading: environmental, occupational, informational, recreational and ritualistic. Purpose is mentioned in essays discussing and outlining models of reading (Beaugrande, 1981; Pumelhart, 1985; Samuels and Kamil, 1984). Ruddell and Speaker (1985) incorporate the idea of goal in the Affective State of their interactive model of reading. Some theorists do not mention purpose (goal, intention, objective, etc.) (e.g., Gough, 1985; LaBerge and Samuels, 1985). Indeed, a check of the index of the third edition of Singer and Ruddell's 960 page collection, Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading (Singer and Ruddell, 1985), finds no listing for purpose, goal, intention, or objective as these relate to theories of reading. Surprisingly, Beaugrande (1981) does not include purpose as one of his sixteen design criteria.

For most information processing theorists, circumstance is conceptualized as "context on the page" (Samuels and Kamil, 1984;

Rumelhart, 1985). Puddell and Speaker offer a wider notion of circumstance. They draw attention to "Reader Environment," which includes textual, conversational and instructional features (1985: pp.754-5). This use of "environment," though, is "delimited to the immediate learning environment of the reader" (1985: p.755). It is not environment as relevant to fluent reading of various sorts of texts, for a variety of purposes.

Given that documents and texts are artifacts of cultural production, what is of central interest for this essay is the treatment of materials in theories of reading.

Materials

Among information processing theorists the multitude of possible reading materials receives passing attention. Reasgrande (1981) in his list of sixteen design criteria for process models of reading includes "typology of materials."

> While most researchers agree that understanding takes account of different types of materials (e.g., narrative versus expository prose), few of them have conclusive measures for setting up such a typology. Accordingly, many models are not in fact built to adapt to such differences, or only to a few obvious ones. (1981: p.267)

Note that materials are here conceived in terms of abstract genre of texts, "narrative versus expository prose." Materials conceived in this manner do not direct attention to the document, as the formatted signs which must be read. Theories working with a restricted, abstract notion of materials will not account for how text genres are encountered and recognized based on document organization.

What Reasgrande's review of ten theories brings out is that, if materials are considered at all, the genres accounted for are narratives, where the work on scripts and story grammars receives application (Rumelhart, 1985; Schank and Abelson, 1977), and expository writing, where propositional content and relations are a central focus (Fintsch and van Dijk, 1978; Frederiksen, 1977). Puddell and Speaker also discuss text materials in terms of these same genres, going so far as to claim that "On the most global

level, the reader decides whether the text is narrative or expository." (1985: p.768)

GENRES AND SOCIAL ORDER

While stories and essays are important types of text--indeed they can be regarded as the most important for Western "high culture" (Shils and Van Den Haag, 1963)--they account, I would expect, for a small fraction of the types of materials functionally literate persons read, outside of their time in schools. Further, there is the question of how important these genres are in relation to the activities that persons must, or prefer to, engage in which produce and reproduce social orders.

If we look at what marks developing countries, especially the most developed ones (Marsh, 1967), an important feature is the one noted by Max Weber: bureaucratization (Weber, 1968). As part of, and central to, the rationalization of large scale societies we find the growth of organizations devoted to what now is called information processing. This is information processing at the interpersonal level, as opposed to the intrapersonal level which interests cognitive science.

The centrality of interpersonal information processing to social order can best be appreciated in relation to the development of writing (Gaur, 1984). A tour of the writing rooms in the British Museum leaves no doubt as to the importance of writing to legal and economic record keeping in early literate cultures. Legends and fables are recorded as well, but these cultures could not have been reproduced and maintained without the record keeping efforts of the literate.

As it was for the ancients, so it is for us today. The narrative and expository genres addressed by cognitive psychology are tremendously important to the accomplishment and reproduction of certain stable social structures. But their relevance is not equally distributed across the class systems of industrial and post-industrial societies. These two genres are important to some groups of people, typically above the bottom level of class structure.

Certain groups of persons are most concerned with story and essay genres: writers, the publishing industry, educators, researchers,

lawyers, physicians, consultants, a wide range of bureaucrats, etc., and students. Students are concerned with these genres because educators are concerned with them. And it seems that aside from educators, writers and the publishing industry, no one is concerned about stories (in print) as part of their livelihood. For the markets that are served by these groups of people, stories are important, as entertainment. For the persons who make up these markets, as for all the persons who read and write expository text, other things are read, and read repeatedly, in daily life.

It is these other things which are read, especially those texts connected in some way with the multitude of bureaucracies that administer our lives, which come to the fore when we look across societies at the varieties of reading as cultural activities.

PART III

CATEGORIES OF TEXT

As a first step toward unpacking the character of reading, consider the list of types of material based reading provided above. The list, of course, is not exhaustive. Nor are all items listed at the same level of abstraction ("assembly instructions" is a gloss for an indefinite set of texts). Some consideration needs to be given to how best to categorize members of the list. While the bases for such work are wide, an initial, heuristic categorization seems useful, for it brings out the contribution of current theories of reading, and points a direction for further theorizing.

The terms of the distinction I wish to propose refer to the poles of a continuum. The continuum represents how texts can be used. At one end of the continuum of text use are reflective texts. At the other end of the continuum are enabling texts.

Use

Before explaining what I mean by the two categories of texts, it will be useful to become clearer on the continuum for which reflective and enabling texts are the poles. The continuum does not represent properties of texts, as if texts were Galilean objects-in-themselves, independent of all context (see Husserl, 1970). The properties of interest are those realized (made real) through how texts are used.

Use, of course, relates to purposes, those of both readers and writers.

Texts, as the outcome of reading formatted signs, afford some uses, while making others difficult. Cricket scores cannot be found by reading stock listings, though the financial status of cricket clubs can sometimes be divined by reading cricket scores.

Out of all the afforded uses, some are the typical, standard ones, as when one uses a telephone book to find a telephone listing. Others are unusual, or less typical uses, as when one uses the telephone book to find out if the number on a business card is a home or office telephone number(7). Typical, standard uses are those which writers orient to and for which they provide.

When we are reminded of a kind of text, e.g., postage stamps, we know and expect some standard use(s) for the text, unless we are unfamiliar with that type of text. To know a type of text is, generally, to know the kinds of uses to which it is put, the kind of purposes readers have for engaging the text. Thus when we categorize a text and place it on the continuum we take it that the text has standard use(s). In some circumstances, though, it may be read for unusual purposes. In such cases we would place the text elsewhere on the continuum, toward the other pole. My interest, though, is in the standard uses to which members of a culture put texts.

Enabling and Reflective Texts

An enabling text, simply, is one which enables the reader to do something. A reflective text is one whose use is that of reflection on the information which the text provides. These categories of text are ideal types, in Weber's sense.

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidely emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. (Weber, 1949: p.90)

As Weber's construct applies here, the distinction between enabling and reflective texts simply emphasizes one side or the other of the

use of texts. Any actual text can be taken up in an enabling or reflective mode, given appropriate purposes and circumstances. For example, we can always do research on how some enabling text is formatted. Such research would treat the chosen text in a reflective mode. Or, we can find some circumstances where typically reflective texts are used to enable some activity, say a discussion of themes in a poem. But the above are unusual uses, not the standard ones which define a text as enabling or reflective.

If all types of texts are placed on a continuum in terms of their standard uses, then the following texts would be categorized as enabling texts: operating and assembly instructions and manuals, skill-oriented textbooks, forms of all sorts (for record keeping, accounting, banking, admissions, applications, contracts, etc.), schedules, indexes, dictionaries, postage stamps, labels-on-controls, bills, grocery lists, telephone listings, lists of winning lottery numbers, menus, musical scores, road signs etc. These texts are produced, as formatted signs, to enable the reader to do particular things, which the texts may require, make possible, or facilitate, e.g., stopping at an intersection, withdrawing funds from a bank, "programming" a washing machine.

At the other end of the continuum are those texts whose standard use is reflection on information (facts and ideas): newspapers and magazines (with their various types of news articles and editorials), greeting cards, religious tracts, short stories, novels, works of non-fiction (books, monographs, journals, papers for presentation), poems, encyclopedias, grafitti, etc. These texts are produced in order to affect, or to provide information to, readers. It is assumed, and maybe even hoped, by the writer, that this type of text may make a difference to the actions of readers. But these texts do not require or make possible some course of action. If a text of this type facilitates action, it is because it has led the reader to react in a certain way, or to reflect on some state of affairs and thus make some judgment or alter some belief.

As the two categories of text are poles on a continuum, naturally there are texts which fall somewhere in between. These types of texts include: program listings (television, radio, theatre, sporting events), maps, astrological charts, labels-on-products, policy statements, stock listings, weather reports, bulletins,

advertisements, (classified ads) business signs, political campaign literature, reviews (of books, cars, plays, movies, concerts, etc.). These types of text are ones which may enable some readers while simply informing others.

These middle point, Reflective/Enabling texts do not require certain actions as part of their use, e.g., no one has to travel to the Grand Canyon as part of the activity of reading a map of the American Southwest. Though such texts may facilitate such a trip. Reading a review of a film in the newspaper neither requires nor makes possible attendance at a screening of the film, but it may enable one to decide which film to go and see this weekend. If the judgment one makes after reading a text leads one to some definite course of action, then we have a text which falls between the two poles of the continuum.

ENABLING AND REFLECTIVE TEXTS COMPARED

In order to deepen the sense that there are differences between the two categories of text which I have introduced it will be useful to compare enabling and reflective texts. There are at least five dimensions of difference between the two categories of texts.

Affordance

One dimension of difference has already been introduced. This is the dimension of affordance, having to do with what texts afford the reader. Enabling texts require, make possible or facilitate action. Reflective texts facilitate judgments about, or engender responses to, states of affairs expressed through the text.

Reflexivity

Second is the dimension of refexivity (Garfinkel, 1967). In the case of enabling texts, the standard reading of them is a move in the activity which the text enables. Filling out a deposit slip is part of the activity of depositing funds in an account. Reading a bus schedule is part of the activity of making arrangements to travel. Reading the dials on a dashboard while driving is part of the activity of operating a car.

In the case of reflective texts, the standard reading of them may provide or contribute bases for action. The action facilitated by the

text, however, is not achieved through reading the text which occasioned the action. One may decide to buy a book based on a glowing review of it, but reading the review is not part of the activity of buying the book. One may decide to vote for some candidate based on her campaign literature, but reading the literature is not part of the act of voting.

There can be exceptions to the disjunctive relation between reading reflective texts and engaging in action on the bases of what one has read. For some courses of action the reflexive relation between reading and acting are less disjunctive. Think of reading to become well-informed, educated. Reading journal articles allows one to make judgments about some state of affairs while becoming knowledgeable about the affairs addressed in the article. But the reading does not require or make possible some standard concrete action. This leads to the next dimension.

Concreteness

Third is the dimension of concreteness of reading-constituted action. By concreteness of action I mean such things as the degree to which the boundaries and segments of actions can be identified by members of the culture under study and whether the action has observable location in time and space.

Enabling texts enable the most concrete action, because of the reflexivity dimension: reading the texts is part of the activity enabled by the text. Reading a software manual enables one to use some computer program correctly. The enabled use is concrete. We, along with other computer literate members of this culture, can see when the use of the program starts, pauses or stops. And all this is seen at some particular time and place: when the person who read the enabling text uses the computer.

Reflective texts, by providing grounds for judgment or engendering responses to states of affairs, may lead to actions which are concrete, like voting or writing a letter to the editor. These actions, as discussed in relation to the reflexivity dimension, are not constituted in whole or part through reading acts. Thus their concreteness does not influence the decision to categorize the texts in question as reflective texts.

Where the dimension of concreteness appears in relation to

reflective texts is in the case of texts whose reading contributes to some wider activity. We are back at the case of reading reflective texts to become well-informed or to mold one's moral character. The activities of becoming knowledgeable or moral are less concrete than the sort of activities constituted in part through reading enabling texts. They are less concrete in the above sense that members of a culture cannot so easily decide when the activity has been commenced or completed, or whether it is being carried on at all.

As befits reflective texts, the activities constituted by reading them are reflective. They are done through reflection, and as such do not become visible in ways which establish oriented-to social structures, i.e., observable, patterned actions accountable in rule-like terms (see Parsons, 1937, and Garfinkel, 1967). Thus reflective actions are less subject to scrutiny and control, more difficult to order. They are just the kind of actions most feared by those who seek total control of people's lives, who censor what can be read. Perhaps this is why reflective texts are valued in societies which value political freedom.

Knowledge of objects and activities external to texts

The fourth dimension is the specificity of knowledge required to read texts. Again, enabling texts are the most concrete. They require specific knowledge of objects or activities external to the text in order for the text to be read successfully. The objects or activities to which enabling texts are relevant must be familiar (see Schutz, 1962).

One cannot use an instruction booklet to program a VCR unless one knows something about the objects of instruction. And not just knowing anything will do. One must know where the buttons, levers and other controls are located, which is the top and which is the front of the machine. The illustrations in the booklet may help, or one may have enough prior knowledge with VCRs, electronic equipment or machinery to know, in general, how to manipulate the object of concern. But to succeed in reading the instruction booklet one must know, or come to know, some specific things about the object(s) to which the text bears some relation.

Or, the enabling text may be related to some activities, which must be understood if the text is to be used successfully. One must

understand some specific things about libraries if one is to successfully read the card catalogue or check out a book. A conception of the social organization of the library is required, though one's conception may be very rudimentary: fill in a form, take it (with or without the book one desires, depending on the library system) to someone at some stationary place in the library, etc. In this case a conception of library organization will help one interpret what the items on the form, the book request slip, mean, require or make possible.

Items like "title" and "author" should be read, in some libraries, as requiring full titles with all co-authors listed, using their full names. Other libraries will put up with abbreviations of titles, and even only author intitials, providing the call number is accurate. And in some libraries, there are no book request forms. One simply takes books off the shelves and presents them, along with a valid library card, to some person at some stationary place, and that person checks out the books in one's name.

As it is for book request forms, so it is for other forms, and things like indexes, postage stamps, bills, menus, musical scores and other enabling texts. They are read successfully if one understands, or comes to know specific things about organized activities transcendent to the activity of reading enabling texts.

With reflective texts the knowledge required of the reader is generally less specific, or will be provided by the text itself. One may have to know something about cities and neighborhoods in order to understand a narrative set in Montreal, but one does not need any knowledge of Montreal's streets independent of what the book provides. To comprehend a news article about self-help programs in St. Anne's parish, Jamaica, it (should not be) necessary to know anything about that parish, aside from what the article provides.

Journal articles require some knowledge of issues, frameworks and phenomena of import to some discipline(s). If one is reading about axon sprouting in the brain, then are specific things which must be known by the reader for the article to make sense. However, these things are not objects or activities which one must come to know independently of reading acts. These things can be learned by reading other reflective texts without going to a neurophysiology lab and using an electron microscope to examine tissue slides. One may have

to do the latter to confirm or falsify the claims in the article of interest, but need not be done to comprehend the article in the first place.

Obviously, for both enabling and reflective texts, knowledge beyond the texts is relevant. For this dimension, what differentiates the two categories of text is how specific the knowledge is which is needed to read, or imparted from, the text. In reading enabling texts, one must be more familiar with the objects or activities to which they are related than with the objects or activities thematized by reflective texts.

Criteria of Success

The fifth dimension is the criteria of success for reading the two categories of text. For reflective texts the primary criterion of success is the apprehension of a coherent or cohesive text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Any inconsistency in the meaning of passages found within the same text should be noticed by the reader, e.g., as he or she evaluates evidence for various hypotheses (Rumelhart, 1985). In the absence of any noticed inconsistency or incoherence, any reading of a document which produces a text is a successful reading. With reflective texts the success of reading is determined in the course of reading itself.

With enabling texts there is an additional criterion of success. While reading, coherence is the criterion of success. Coherence can be overriden by a second criterion, one transcendent to the reading act. This is the criterion of usefulness. A useful reading is one which allows the reader to accomplish whatever activity is enabled by a reading of the text. The way in which one fills out an income tax form may seem correct, given what sense was made of the form at the time it was completed. If one receives the refund which was expected, then the reading of the form was both coherent and useful. But if the government responds with a notice that monies are owed to it, then one's reading was coherent, at the time, but turned out not to be useful.

So it is, as well, with object-oriented enabling texts. If assembly instructions for a bicycle are read and make sense, until one tries to follow the instructions, then a coherent reading again turns out not to be useful. One may re-read the instructions and find that

the same sense is made of them. In that case, one may conclude that the instructions are in some way deficient, or perhaps are not the ones required for the model of bicycle now strewn on the garage floor.

If one has read a bus schedule, has no reason to believe that it has been read incorrectly, and makes it to a bus stop at the time marked on the schedule, one expects that one will catch the bus. If no bus shows, one can find mulitiple explanations as to why that might be the case. If it later turns out that one waited at the right time at the wrong bus stop, then it will have been the case that one produced a coherent reading of the text, but one that was not useful.

From these examples we can say that for enabling texts, a successful reading is a useful reading. The usefulness of a reading is more important than one's sense that the text, as read, was coherent. Indeed, the usefulness criterion is so important for enabling texts that one can try out questionable interpretations of text, as when connecting a stereo component system, and if the results are useful, count one's reading as a success. In such cases the tractability of the referent of the text proves the coherence of one's previously dubious interpretation.

CIRCUMSTANCE AND TEXT CATEGORY

Consider the five dimensions of difference between the enabling and reflective categories of text: what reading them affords, the relation of reading to what the texts afford, the concreteness of the activity they afford, the specificity of the knowledge involved in reading the texts, and the criteria of successful reading. Collectively the difference between the two categories of text can be understood as dependent primarily on another condition of reading's rationality. This is the condition of <u>circumstance</u>.

The intelligibility and successful reading of enabling text are far more dependent on the circumstances of reading than are the intelligibility and successful reading of reflective texts. One must look to the scenic environment, where enabling text referents are to be found, in order for such texts to make sense. And they make sense because of one's prior, or acquired, specific knowledge of the objects or activities relevant to the particular enabling text of interest. If that knowledge does not include how the text one encounters is part of the concrete activity which it enables, then one has little chance

of producing a useful, i.e., a successful, reading of the text.

Reflective texts, on the other hand, are the epitome of what Olson conceives the text to be: language which can be understood independently of knowledge of its writers and the place and time of its production (Olson, 1977). Such texts can be read, and have their affect anywhere. This is how it is for us, though for other cultures, in other times, as in Japan (Namekawa, 1977), scenic, bodily and mental environments were important to the reading of reflective texts. These environments are, in perhaps insufficiently appreciated ways, important for us, but their importance arises from a sense of the circumstances one prefers, rather than circumstances logically required, to accomplish a successful reading.

CONCLUSION: THEORIES, CATEGORIES, ORDER, ETHNOGRAPHY AND LITERACY

If we shift from our examination of categories of text, and turn back to current information processing theories of reading, we can appreciate the difference between what we know and what we need to learn. Information processing theories of reading handle narrative and expositional texts. For the most part, these fall into the reflective text category.

The exception are instructional texts. These are enabling texts, but they make use of the expository genre of writing. However, what we know about the latter texts is no more than what we know about reflective texts. We know that and how they are cohesive, but we do not know how they enable persons to do actions of which the texts are a part. That is, we know something about the organization of cognitive processes during reading expository text, but we do not know about the cognitive processes through which those texts are related to the activities they enable. If fluent reading is rationally done reading which is successful, then we do not yet know what constitutes fluent reading of enabling texts.

In coming to a wider understanding of fluent reading in our culture we also will come to a better understanding of reading's contribution to social order. The hallmark of developed society is bureaucratization. Now we can appreciate that the administration of society depends on enabling texts. Record-keeping, banking, contracts, inventory control, and accounting, i.e., interpersonal information processing, all depend on enabling texts.

As to how we might achieve a wider understanding of fluent reading and its relevance to social order, i.e., understand reading as cultural activities, we need the cooperation of cognitive psychology and the cultural sciences. And first of all, we need ethnographies of reading. Particular types of material-based reading need to be captured in typical circumstances. The categories of the analysis of texts presented here need to be superseded by careful studies of how we do what we do. I expect these ethnographies to be phenomenological (Schutz, 1962; Heap, 1977). And for that effort I expect that the place to begin is with readings-gone-wrong. Drawing from early work in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1963; 1967) and phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962), it is likely that the occasions when our reading efforts break down, as when our readings are incoherent, or coherent but not useful, will be the times when we can learn the most about the organization of reading. What I expect we will learn is what the conditions of rationality are, and what practices, strategies (see Paris et al, 1983) and assumptions are functional for each material-based type of reading.

There is a final reason why we ought take interest in the culturally possible forms of reading, especially as they engage enabling texts. Literacy education in schools today largely uses reflective texts as enabling texts. This is done by incorporating stories and essays into lesson activities where the texts are supposed to be used to enable the reader to answer questions or locate information. Students are given experience with texts in an enabling mode, but the texts used are not the sorts of text whose standard use outside schools enables students to get done what needs to be done, to cope with and manage our kind of text-mediated life.

If schooling is to aid students in achieving functional literacy, then students must have the opportunity to do more than treat reflective texts as enabling texts. They must have the opportunity to encounter enabling texts in the sorts of circumstances which differentiate them from reflective texts. Literacy education must be both reflective and enabling.

In the end, or very near it, the point of understanding reading as cultural activities is to teach others how to understand reading as cultural activities.

NOTES

1. I say "men and women," in that order, on the basis of egalitarian and alphabetic principles.

Human sensibilities demand that exclusive use of male pronouns be avoided. I believe that the double-barreled pronouns (he/she, him/her), when used with the masculine pronoun always in the primary position, are little better. Lacking an asexual pronoun with which I am comfortable, I have resorted to alphabetizing pronouns in order to decide primacy of position: her/him, he/she. It is serendipitous that this usage seems to provide equal opportunity for primacy of pronoun position.

2. The phrase "formatted signs" is used in order to denote the fact that we do not just encounter signs on surfaces. The signs are formatted in certain ways. The development of these ways of formatting signs is essential for an understanding of the history of textuality. Put differently, the development of the alphabetic principle, by itself, cannot account for the development of literacy. Conventions for laying out and reading "signs on a surface" had to be developed. On this point see the excellent essay by Morrison (forthcoming).

3. The definition of rationality which I follow, with one notable reservation, is one which has had wide influence in sociology. In 1937 Talcott Parsons defined rational action. He wrote: "Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by means which, among those available to the actor, are instrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science." (Parsons, 1937: p.58). My one disagreement is that voiced by phenomenological sociologists. Parsons' defiation is a model of rationality for scientific methodology, but is inappropriate as a defintion and standard for practical action in everyday life (see Schutz, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967). If we reword the last phrase, "by positive science," to read "by actors themselves," then we will have a conception of rationality consistent with the situated, social perspective central to the line of inquiry advanced here (see Heap, forthcoming).

4. It seems to me that the effort to produce computational theories of rational reading sometimes pushes to the limit the idea (metaphor?) that we reason and act like digital computers. For example, Rumelhart's well known work on an interactive theory of reading ends by giving a set of mathematical equations which define a system of hypothesis evaluation. This system "makes near optimal use of the information available at any given point in time" (Rumelhart, 1985: p.749). The system seems to do just that, and a reading machine could be programmed using the set of mathematical equations presented, but it is not at all clear that humans process "information" in this "near optimal" way, all the time, or even most of the time. This opens up wonderful questions about the difference between machine and human processing, questions which cannot be entertained if one begins by assuming cognition to be computational. Central to the questions raised is the phenomenon of contingency (see Garfinkel, 1967 for an obsessive appreciation of the place of contingency in social action).
5. By "analytic" I mean grammatically necessary to, or part of the concept of, fluent reading (see Hacker, 1972). Analytic is used here in the Kantian sense, where, for example, the idea of being unmarried is analytic to the idea of what a bachelor is: an unmarried man.
6. This formulation is not altogether persuasive, for circumstance, environment and context, along with situation, setting and occasion, can all be used as synonyms. What I wish to mark is that out of all the things which could be relevant (the circumstance), from a variety of sources (environments), only some turn out to be relevant (the context). Relevancy is the key issue (Gurvitsch, 1964), and it cannot be handled or determined except in relation to that to which it is relevant. What the object of attention is, and what its context is, are co-given. They are reflexively elaborated and cannot be determined independently of each other (Garfinkel, 1967).
7. Find the name in the book. If the number is different than on the business card, then the card lists the office number. If two numbers are listed in the book, one should be the same as on the card.

The point of such an exercise might be to discover if the carded person works out of her or his home, which may mean that he or she has not had sufficient income to afford an office. Such information could be consequential for deciding whether to engage the person's services.

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